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2002HOCHI00203 - UNCLASSIFIED

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ACTION EAP-00

INFO	LOG-00	NP-00	AID-00	AMAD-00	ACQ-00	CIAE-00	DINT-00
	DODE-00	SRPP-00	DS-00	EB-00	ED-01	FBIE-00	UTED-00
	VC-00	HHS-01	H-01	TEDE-00	INR-00	IO-00	L-00
	VCE-00	MOFM-05	MOF-01	AC-01	NSAE-00	OIC-02	OMB-01
	OPIC-01	PA-00	PC-01	PM-00	PRS-00	ACE-00	P-00
	SP-00	SSO-00	STR-00	TEST-00	TRSE-00	USIE-00	EPAE-00
	PMB-00	DSCC-00	PRM-00	DRL-02	G-00	NFAT-00	SAS-00
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FM AMCONSUL HO CHI MINH CITY
TO SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 6046
AMEMBASSY HANOI IMMEDIATE
INFO USMISSION GENEVA
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UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 03 HO CHI MINH CITY 000203

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TAGS: [PHUM](#) [PREF](#) [PGOV](#) [PINS](#) [SOCI](#) [PREL](#) [KIRF](#) [VM](#) [CB](#) [HUMANR](#) [ETMIN](#)
SUBJECT: VIETNAM'S CENTRAL HIGHLANDS: REFUGEES WHO
RETURNED ON THEIR OWN AND SOME WHO NEVER MADE IT ACROSS

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[1](#). (U) SUMMARY: DURING A MARCH 1-3 TRIP TO THE CENTRAL HIGHLANDS, CONGENOFFS MET WITH VILLAGERS IN TWO DAK LAK COMMUNITIES AND VISITED A PROTESTANT WORSHIP HOUSE IN ONE OF THE COMMUNITIES. SEVERAL OF THE VILLAGERS WERE ETHNIC MINORITY VIETNAMESE RETURNEES FROM CAMBODIA -- TWO OF WHOM HAD RETURNED ON THEIR OWN, PRIOR TO UNHCR REPATRIATION. ONE FAMILY HAD BEEN TURNED BACK TO VIETNAM AT THE BORDER. NONE CLAIMED ANY MISTREATMENT AT THE HANDS OF VIETNAMESE AUTHORITIES UPON THEIR RETURN, THOUGH ONE SAID OTHER VILLAGERS HAD TAUNTED HER. THERE WAS ONE DETAILED COMPLAINT ABOUT A LAND DISPUTE. BECAUSE THE VILLAGERS DID NOT SPEAK MUCH VIETNAMESE, CONGENOFFS HAD TO RELY ON THE VILLAGE CHIEF AND A VILLAGE INTERPRETER TO HELP WITH TRANSLATION. END SUMMARY.

THE RETURNEE WHO CAME IN FROM THE COLD

[2](#). (U) IN DAK LAK PROVINCE, CG EMI LYNN YAMAUCHI AND FSN POL/ECON ASSISTANT MET WITH Y THAT, AN ETHNIC MNONG BHER MALE. HE HAD RETURNED TO YUN YUH VILLAGE ON FEBRUARY 16, 2001, WITHOUT ASSISTANCE FROM UNHCR (WHOSE FIRST GROUP OF REPATRIATES TO VIETNAM RETURNED ON FEBRUARY 19). THE VILLAGE CHIEF AND ANOTHER VILLAGER WHOSE RELATIVES WERE STILL IN CAMBODIA ALSO ATTENDED THIS MEETING.

[3](#). (SBU) ACCORDING TO Y THAT, HE WAS "LURED AWAY BY BAD PEOPLE" AND CROSSED THE BORDER TO CAMBODIA, 15 KM AWAY. THE "BAD PERSON'S" NAME WAS MA CHEL. HE HAD LEFT HIS COFFEE FIELDS, WIFE AND FOUR CHILDREN BEHIND. Y THAT STAYED IN THE MONDOLKIRI CAMP, BUT AS FAR AS HE KNEW, HIS CAMP HAD RECEIVED NO VISITORS FROM VIETNAM, CAMBODIA, OR THE U.S.

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NOW THAT HE WAS BACK IN YUN YUH, HE WAS HAPPY. HIS FRIENDS CAME TO VISIT HIM AND HE WAS TREATED WELL UPON HIS RETURN. Y THAT SPORTED A CRISPLY-IRONED, PINK SHORT-SLEEVED SHIRT, KHAKI SHORTS, AND NUMEROUS TATTOOS ON HIS FOREARMS. HE OFFERED TO SHOW CONGENOFFS HIS HOME, WHICH WAS MODEST, BUT FULL OF "FRIENDS". THE COFFEE TABLE FEATURED FAMILY PHOTOS UNDER THE GLASS TOP.

[4](#). (U) Y SER, THE VILLAGE CHIEF SINCE 1987, RESPONDED TO QUESTIONS FROM THE CG. HE STATED THAT ECONOMIC AND LIVING STANDARDS HAD BEEN IMPROVING IN YUN YUH UNTIL AROUND 1999. THE VILLAGE MAINLY CULTIVATES COFFEE AND HAS NOT STARTED TO DIVERSIFY ITS CROPS. IT HAS A POPULATION OF 811, OF WHOM "750 ARE BELIEVERS WHO HAVE THEIR OWN WORSHIP HOUSE". THERE IS NO RESIDENT PASTOR, WHICH IS WHY THEIR WORSHIP HOUSE CANNOT BE CALLED A CHURCH. THE VILLAGE HAD HAD A PEACEFUL, "NORMAL" CHRISTMAS, WITH LARGE ATTENDANCE AT THE

WORSHIP HOUSE SERVICES.

15. (U) ACCORDING TO VILLAGE CHIEF Y SER, 64 VILLAGERS - INCLUDING ENTIRE FAMILIES - HAD LEFT YUN YUH LAST SPRING. HE DISCOVERED THIS WHEN PEOPLE DID NOT SHOW UP FOR WORSHIP SERVICES AND FROM "CAMBODIAN TRADERS WHO HAD TOLD (HIM) THEY HAD SEEN SOME OF (HIS) PEOPLE OVER IN CAMBODIA." Y SER SAID THERE HAD BEEN NO HINT OF PROBLEMS PRIOR TO THEIR DEPARTURE. WHILE HE HAD HEARD THAT OTHER VILLAGES "HAD LOST" PEOPLE, HE BELIEVED HIS VILLAGE HAD LOST THE MOST. YUN YUH VILLAGE HAS ELECTRICITY AND IRRIGATION. THERE IS AN ELEMENTARY SCHOOL, WITH INSTRUCTION IN VIETNAMESE BY VIETNAMESE KINH TEACHERS.

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16. (U) CONOFFS HAD SPLIT OFF FROM THE CG AND DPO, AND WERE FOLLOWED BY FOUR "VILLAGERS" WHO REMAINED WITH THEM FOR THE TWO-HOUR VISIT. ALTHOUGH THE FOUR MEN APPEARED TO BE VILLAGERS, IT SEEMED THEY MIGHT ALSO VILLAGE SECURITY OFFICERS. IN RESPONSE TO CONOFFS' QUESTIONS ABOUT RELIGIOUS PRACTICE, THESE VILLAGERS SAID THEY WERE PROTESTANTS. BASED ON SUBSEQUENT INTERACTION, CONOFFS SAW NO REASON TO DOUBT THAT. WHEN CONOFFS ASKED TO SEE THEIR PLACE OF WORSHIP, THEY WERE LED TO A BARN-LIKE STRUCTURE CONTAINING 24 BENCHES, AN ALTAR WITH A SIMPLE CROSS, BIBLES IN THE LOCAL DIALECT, AND CHRISTIAN SONGBOOKS. THE VILLAGERS EXPLAINED THAT 120 HOUSEHOLDS WERE PROTESTANT. SEVEN HUNDRED WORSHIPPERS ATTENDED SERVICES EVERY SUNDAY; 14 HOUSEHOLDS WERE CATHOLIC AND TRAVELED TO A NEARBY TOWN TO ATTEND SERVICES. WHEN ASKED ABOUT CHRISTMAS 2001, THE VILLAGERS SAID THERE WERE "NO PROBLEMS."

"I'M PRETTY SURE I MADE IT TO CAMBODIA"

17. (U) ALSO IN DAK LAK PROVINCE, CONGENOFFS VISITED BUON SUT M'GRU VILLAGE, COMPRISED OF ETHNIC EDE AND VIETNAMESE KINH. ACCORDING TO THE VILLAGE CHIEF OF 27 YEARS, MA HONG, NINE PEOPLE WERE TURNED BACK AT THE CAMBODIAN BORDER BY VIETNAMESE SOLDIERS. ONE GROUP WAS A DIVORCED WOMAN AND HER CHILD; THE OTHER GROUP WAS A WIFE (WHOSE HUSBAND HAD ALREADY GONE TO CAMBODIA) AND HER FIVE CHILDREN. THE SUT M'GRU VILLAGE CHIEF SAID THERE HAD BEEN NO BEATINGS, NO VIOLENCE AT THE BORDER. HE SAID HE FELT SORRY FOR THE RETURNEES, WHO HAD "BEEN LURED AWAY BY BAD PEOPLE." DURING HIS TENURE AS VILLAGE CHIEF, THE POPULATION HAD INCREASED FROM 300 TO THE CURRENT 1001. SUT M'GRU HAS BEEN ELECTRIFIED SINCE 1994. IT HAS AN ELEMENTARY AND JUNIOR HIGH SCHOOL WITH VIETNAMESE KINH AND EDE TEACHERS. MA HONG EXPECTS THE ETHNIC MINORITY LANGUAGE BILINGUAL PROGRAM TO BEGIN NEXT YEAR. MOST VILLAGERS FOLLOW TRADITIONAL TRIBAL PRACTICES OF WORSHIPPING THE GODS OF WATER, GOOD HARVESTS, ETC. MA HONG NOTED THAT WHILE THERE WERE "JUST A FEW PROTESTANT HOUSEHOLDS," THEY WORSHIPPED AT HOME.

18. (SBU) DPO SPOKE THROUGH A VILLAGE INTERPRETER WITH AN EDE WOMAN WHO SAID SHE HAD TRIED TO GET TO THE CAMPS IN CAMBODIA, BUT HAD GOTTEN LOST ON THE WAY. THE CONVERSATION - TRANSLATED FROM EDE TO VIETNAMESE AND THEN ENGLISH - TOOK PLACE IN A COMFORTABLE, LARGE WOODEN HOUSE WHERE THE WOMAN, WHO IS ONE OF TWELVE CHILDREN, WAS SURROUNDED BY FAMILY MEMBERS. THE WOMAN'S NAME WAS A MI THOI. SHE SAID SHE WENT TO CAMBODIA BECAUSE A "BAD PERSON" HAD TOLD HER THAT IF SHE COULD JUST GET ACROSS THE BORDER, SHE WOULD BE GIVEN MONEY AND THE CHANCE TO HAVE A BEAUTIFUL LIFE IN A NEW COUNTRY. SHE SAID SHE CROSSED INTO CAMBODIA BUT COULD NOT FIND THE CAMPS. AFTER SPENDING TWO WEEKS IN THE WOODS, SHE RETURNED TO SUT M'GRU. A MI THOI SAID SHE WAS ON HER OWN THE WHOLE TIME, EXCEPT FOR HER 6-YEAR OLD SON, WHOM SHE HAD TAKEN WITH HER. SHE SAID SHE WAS DIVORCED AND A PROTESTANT, BUT DID NOT INDICATE THIS WAS A FACTOR IN HER DECISION TO LEAVE THE VILLAGE FOR CAMBODIA. DPO LATER LEARNED A MI THOI HAD NO EDUCATION, SINCE HER FAMILY HAD

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BEEN TOO POOR WHEN SHE WAS YOUNGER.

19. (SBU) A MI THOI REPEATED SEVERAL TIMES THAT HER FAMILY HAD WELCOMED HER BACK AND THAT SHE WAS VERY HAPPY TO BE WITH THEM AGAIN. STILL, SHE APPEARED QUITE SAD. SHE SAID HER FAMILY AND THE WHOLE VILLAGE HAD HELPED HER SINCE HER RETURN. ASKED FOR SPECIFICS, SHE SAID HER FAMILY HAD GIVEN HER A HOUSE OF HER OWN. THE ONLY PROBLEM SHE MENTIONED WAS RELATED TO A FEW "BAD VILLAGE OFFICIALS" WHO THOUGHT SHE WAS RICH BECAUSE OF HER NEW HOUSE AND WERE CAUSING HER DIFFICULTIES. A MI THOI DID NOT SEEM AFRAID TO SPEAK UP AND ANSWERED SEVERAL QUESTIONS AT LENGTH AND WITH EMOTION. DPO BELIEVES THE VILLAGE INTERPRETER PROBABLY SUMMARIZED ANSWERS RATHER THAN TRANSLATING ALL THE DETAILS, BUT GENERALLY PROVIDED AN ACCURATE PICTURE OF A YOUNG WOMAN LEADING A VERY DIFFICULT LIFE WHO DECIDED TO TRY FOR SOMETHING BETTER AND FAILED.

UNSCRUPULOUS LOCAL AUTHORITIES AND LAND CONFISCATION?

110. (U) CG (ACCOMPANIED BY FSN POL/ECON ASSISTANT AND VILLAGE CHIEF MA HONG) VISITED THE WIFE (WHOSE HUSBAND HAD ALREADY GONE TO CAMBODIA) AND HER FIVE CHILDREN. THE HUSBAND'S NAME IS Y-DHEC EBAN. THE WIFE'S NAME IS H'DRO ADUONG. ACCORDING TO THE WIFE, HER HUSBAND LEFT FOR CAMBODIA LAST AUTUMN. THE TIMELINE IS UNCLEAR, BUT SOME TIME LATER, THE FAMILY CAME HOME ONE NIGHT TO FIND THE ELECTRICITY CUT OFF. UNCERTAIN ABOUT WHAT THAT MEANT, THEY DECIDED TO TRY TO FOLLOW THEIR FATHER TO CAMBODIA, BUT WERE TURNED BACK AT THE BORDER. H'DRO ADUONG GREW MORE RETICENT AT THIS POINT, EVEN THOUGH IT APPEARED THE VILLAGE CHIEF

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WAS REASSURING HER IN THEIR NATIVE EDE LANGUAGE.

111. (SBU) THE FAMILY'S ELDEST DAUGHTER HOWEVER, WHO APPEARED TO BE ABOUT 20-YEARS OLD, WAS FIDGETING AND CLEARLY ANGRY ABOUT SOMETHING. SHE HAD ENGAGED IN A RUNNING DISCUSSION WITH HER MOTHER IN ETHNIC EDE SINCE THE CG'S ARRIVAL. SHE SAID HER NAME WAS A ME PHIAN. IN RESPONSE TO QUESTIONS, SHE CLAIMED THAT THERE HAD BEEN LAND PROBLEMS WITH THE LOCAL AUTHORITIES OVER THE LAST 20 MONTHS. AFTER RUMMAGING IN A CUPBOARD, SHE PRODUCED COPIES OF LEGAL DOCUMENTS SEEKING RETURN OF LAND THAT HER FATHER (Y-DHEC EBAN) CLAIMED THE VILLAGE CHIEF AND CU SUE COMMUNE PEOPLE'S COMMITTEE HAD UNLAWFULLY CONFISCATED AND SOLD FOR THEIR OWN PROFIT. A SEPARATE DOCUMENT WAS A LETTER OF COMPLAINT TO THE VILLAGE POLICE, ALLEGING THAT BECAUSE OF THE LAND DISPUTE, SIX OTHER ETHNIC MINORITY VILLAGERS HAD COME TO BEAT Y-DHEK EBAN'S WIFE. THEY INJURED HER SO BADLY THAT SHE HAD TO GO TO THE DAK LAK PROVINCIAL HOSPITAL FOR EMERGENCY TREATMENT. BOTH DOCUMENTS INDICATE THE PETITIONER (Y-DHEK EBAN) HAD PRESENTED HIS CASE SEVERAL TIMES TO THE COMMUNE COMMITTEE.

112. (SBU) WHEN CG LATER ASKED A PROVINCIAL OFFICIAL WHETHER SHE WAS FAMILIAR WITH THE CASE, THE OFFICIAL RESPONDED YES. ACCORDING TO THIS OFFICIAL, THE FAMILY IS RIGHT ON CERTAIN POINTS, BUT WRONG ON OTHERS. THEN THE OFFICIAL VOLUNTEERED RETURNED ON THEIR OWN AND SOME WHO NEVER MADE IT ACROSS

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THAT THE ETHNIC MINORITY VILLAGERS OFTEN DO NOT UNDERSTAND LAWS AND REGULATIONS - "EVEN THOSE THAT GIVE THEM GREATER PRIVILEGES AND BENEFITS THAT THE REST OF US (VIETNAMESE KINH) DO NOT HAVE."

113. (SBU) RETURNING TO THE ELDEST DAUGHTER A ME PHIAN, SHE SAID THE FAMILY HAD DEPARTED ON DECEMBER 24 FOR THE CAMBODIAN BORDER. SHE WAS NOT CERTAIN WHEN THEY HAD RETURNED, BUT THE VILLAGE CHIEF RECKONED IT WAS 8-9 DAYS AFTER THAT. CG ASKED HOW THE FAMILY HAD BEEN TREATED SINCE THEIR RETURN. A ME PHIAN RESPONDED WITH A NEUTRAL SHRUG, BUT COMPLAINED THAT SOME DRUNKEN VILLAGERS HAD TAUNTED AND SCARED THE FAMILY LATE ONE NIGHT. THE VILLAGE CHIEF THEN INTERRUPTED TO SAY THAT THE POLICE RESPONDED IMMEDIATELY AND TOOK THE ROWDIES TO THE COMMUNE STATION AND TOLD THEM NOT TO DO IT AGAIN. A ME PHIAN DID NOT CONTRADICT THIS. ASKED IF THE BROKEN CLOCK WITH A THREE-DIMENSIONAL PICTURE OF THE LAST SUPPER MEANT THE FAMILY WAS PROTESTANT OR CATHOLIC, SHE REPLIED THEY WERE PROTESTANT. SHE GAVE NO INDICATION THAT SHE THOUGHT THIS HAD PLAYED A ROLE IN EITHER THE LAND OR BORDER-CROSSING ISSUES.

114. (SBU) COMMENT: A ME PHIAN'S FEARLESSNESS IN PRESENTING US THE LAND DOCUMENTS RIGHT IN FRONT OF THE VILLAGE CHIEF (WHO MIGHT WELL HAVE BEEN ONE OF THE "CORRUPT LOCAL OFFICIALS" REFERRED TO IN THE WRITTEN ALLEGATIONS) WAS IMPRESSIVE. SHE HAD RECEIVED NO SCHOOLING, AND IN FACT, THE HIGHEST LEVEL OF EDUCATION AMONG THE RETURNEES WE MET WAS FOURTH GRADE. EVEN THE VILLAGE CHIEF TOLD US THAT HIS IDEA OF "FAR AWAY" WAS ANYTHING BEYOND 60 METERS. DAK LAK MARKED THE FIRST TIME WE HAD HEARD A GOVERNMENT OFFICIAL

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HINT OPENLY AT RESENTMENT TOWARD ETHNIC MINORITIES FOR THE SPECIAL BENEFITS THEY ARE ENTITLED TO. IT WAS ALSO THE ONLY DETAILED "LAND PROBLEM" WE HEARD ABOUT ON THIS TRIP. SEPTTEL WILL FOLLOW ON THIS LAST SUBJECT. YAMAUCHI

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